

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Fossil Find*

“I wonder what we’ll find, Peter!” Tara said excitedly as we raced down the hill towards the beach.

“I bet there’ll be some great fossils!” I replied, panting.

When we reached the beach car park, I let Sparky, my golden Labrador, off the lead. He bounded down the steps and ran towards the sea, wagging his tail happily.

“Look at that!” Tara cried as we jumped down onto the beach.

I gasped in amazement. About two hundred metres away the cliff had collapsed, spilling mud and boulders all over the beach and out to sea. Huge grey rocks, the size of cars were strewn all over the sand!

A crowd of people were gathered by the landslide. Tara and I ran over to see what was happening. As we made our way through the crowd, I could hear everyone talking excitedly.

“It sounded like thunder!”

“It woke me in the night!”

“I thought it was an earthquake!”

“Lucky no one was hurt...”

We made our way to the front of the crowd and stopped at a rope strung up between two poles. On the other side of the rope, a camera crew was setting up.

“It’s the BBC!” I exclaimed.

A short stocky man from the crew came over to the crowd and spoke to us in a loud voice.

“I’m the producer,” he explained. “We’re almost ready to start the interview, so please be as quiet as possible. Thank you.”

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Everyone quietened down. The producer went over to a woman with long dark hair and gave her a microphone.

“She must be the reporter,” I whispered.

The woman brushed the hair away from her face and then began, “I’m here on the beach at Seatown in Dorset. With me is Dr John Simmons, a fossil expert from the Heritage Coast Centre in Charmouth.”

Dr Simmons was a tall thin man with a serious expression. He looked slightly familiar.

“He came to our school last term,” Tara said.

“Oh, yes,” I replied, suddenly remembering where I had seen him before.

Dr Simmons had given a talk in assembly and shown us some of his fossil collection. We leaned over the rope and strained to hear what he was saying.



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“Dr Simmons,” the reporter continued, “Tell us about the landslide.”

“Over five hundred metres of cliff have collapsed,” he replied. “It’s one of the biggest landslides we’ve had here on the Jurassic Coast and it will almost certainly have brought many new and interesting fossils out onto the beach.”

“What kinds of fossils?” the reporter asked.

“Sea creatures mainly,” he answered.

“Sea creatures?” the reporter repeated, looking puzzled.

“These cliffs were laid down in the Jurassic period,” Dr Simmons explained, “when the area was a warm, tropical sea, teeming with fish and squid. And preying on them were giant sea reptiles, the most common being the ichthyosaurus.”

“What’s an ichthyosaurus?” the reporter asked interestedly.

“It was a dolphin like creature with large eyes and crocodile teeth,” he replied. “The first complete fossil of an ichthyosaurus was found here two hundred years ago by a girl called Mary Anning. She was only twelve years old when she dug it up.”

“Only twelve!” the reporter exclaimed.

“Yes,” Dr Simmons said, “and Mary Anning went on to make many other important discoveries here, including the first plesiosaur, a huge long necked sea reptile.”

“And have any dinosaurs been found here?” the reporter continued.

“Dinosaur fossils have been found a few miles west, near Charmouth,” Dr Simmons replied. “But they are very rare.”

“Why is that?” the reporter asked.

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“Dinosaurs lived on the land,” he replied, “but occasionally was one swept out to sea and fossilised in the mud.”

“Tara, we might find a dinosaur!” I said excitedly.

I felt a shiver of excitement run up my spine. This could be our chance to make a great discovery!

“Finally, what advice would you give to fossil hunters, Dr Simmons?” the reporter asked.

“Stay away from the cliffs,” he replied firmly. “They are extremely unstable and dangerous. Another landslide could occur at any time, especially after all the heavy rain we’ve had during March. There’s no need to go climbing on the cliffs as the best fossils can be found on the beach.”

“Thank you, Dr Simmons,” the reporter said with a smile. She turned back to face the camera and finished her piece.

When the interview was over, the crowd of people walked away. Sparky ran over to us and shook himself vigorously, sending water everywhere!

“Sparky!” I laughed. “You’re soaking!”

“Woof!” he barked playfully.

“Come on, Peter,” Tara said, tugging at my arm. “Let’s go fossil hunting!”

We rushed over to a pile of freshly fallen rocks. I scanned the ground excitedly, wondering what I would find. I picked up a grey stone about the size of an apple and examined it closely. It had been buried in the cliffs for millions of years, and now it was about to reveal its secrets!

I placed the stone on a flat boulder and eagerly took my fossil hammer and goggles out of my rucksacks. I put on my goggles and raised the hammer. I held my breath in anticipation. Then I hit the rock hard. Crack! The stone broke in two.

“Anything, Peter?” Tara asked eagerly.

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I picked up a piece of the stone and examined it. In the centre was a lovely spiral shell, milky white in colour.

“An ammonite,” I replied, happily. “It’s a good one too!”

The fossil shell shone in the sunlight. It looked so clean and new – it was difficult to believe it was millions of years old.

As I put the fossil in my rucksack, I heard Sparky barking madly. He was half way up the side of the cliff and chasing seagulls!

“Come down, Sparky,” I called out sharply.

He looked at me and then turned to come down the cliff. I watched anxiously as he stepped over the loose stones, carefully trying to find his way down the steep slope.

Suddenly he slipped. My heart skipped a beat as he skidded, loosening a shower of rocks.

By the time Sparky regained his footing, an avalanche of rocks and boulders was tumbling down the side of the cliff.

Then, just above Sparky, a huge boulder broke loose!



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“Sparky!” I cried in horror.

Sparky got out of the way of the boulder just in time. As the block fell it smashed into the side of the cliff, dislodging more rocks, which streamed down the cliff face.

Sparky scrambled down the slope onto the beach, only just avoiding the huge boulder as it tumbled after him.

“Look out, Tara!” I yelled.

The boulder bounced a few times and then smashed onto the beach a short distance away, sending a shower of pebbles into the air. I turned and shielded my face as the sharp stones flew everywhere.

“Are you all right?” Tara asked when the shower had stopped.

“I’m OK,” I replied. “No harm done.”

Sparky ran over and lay shaking at my feet. He was terrified. I sat down on the beach beside him and stroked him gently. I could feel his heart pounding from the shock.

Tara went over to the fallen boulder.

“Peter, come over here!” she called.

I stood up and went over to join her.

“Look at this!” she said, pointing to a dark marking on the boulder.

I bent down next to Tara and inspected the boulder. It had cracked along one side and a piece of rock had broken away to reveal a fossil. It was about a centimetre long and shaped like a triangle.

“It looks like ...” I began.

“A tooth,” Tara interrupted. “It’s a tooth!”

We dashed over to our rucksacks and grabbed our tools. I quickly put my chisel against the rock and raised the hammer.

“Careful, Peter!” Tara warned. “We don’t want to damage it.”

Tara was right. I lowered the hammer and tapped at the rock gently. Tara joined in and we loosened a section of

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rock above the fossil. We prised away the loose section and a large piece of rock fell to the ground with a crash.

I gasped in astonishment. We had uncovered three more teeth! I stared at the fossil in amazement. We had never found a fossil like this before. It was as good as one from a museum!

“Oh Peter,” Tara cried excitedly. “I think we’ve found a dinosaur!”